

SHEEP CREEK VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Preliminary Environmental Assessment

USDA – Forest Service
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
La Grande Ranger District

The La Grande Ranger District recently completed a preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Sheep Creek Vegetation Management Project, now available on the web for review. The evaluated area consists of approximately 30,000 acres of National Forest System lands on the La Grande Ranger District. The project area is approximately 22 air miles southwest of La Grande, Oregon (Townships 5 & 6 South, Range 35 East). The planning area is within Union County and contains approximately 700 acres of the Blue Springs wildland urban interface area (WUI).

Vegetation management strategies proposed in this project vary across two action alternatives. These alternatives include a combination of commercial harvest treatments, non-commercial vegetation management, and prescribed burning. Other activities proposed include tethered logging and off-highway vehicle trail improvements. A project-level plan amendment to the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Plan is proposed with this project to facilitate harvest on slopes over 30% using new harvesting equipment technology (tethered logging equipment).

When proposing a Forest Plan amendment, the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219), as amended, requires the responsible official to identify the substantive requirements of the rule that are likely to be directly related to the amendment (36 CFR 219.13(b)(5)). The substantive requirements that are likely to be directly related to the proposed amendment for the Sheep Creek project are:

1. 36 CFR 219.8(a)(2)(ii) Soils and soil productivity, including guidance to reduce soil erosion and sedimentation. (*Ecological sustainability*);
2. 36 CFR 219.8(b)(3) Multiple uses that contribute to local regional, and national economies in a sustainable manner. (*Social and economic sustainability*);
3. 36 CFR 219.10(a) (7) The responsible official shall consider: Reasonably foreseeable risks to ecological, social, and economic sustainability. (*Integrated resource management for multiple use*)
4. 36 CFR 219.11(d)(2) Timber harvest would occur only where soil, slope, or other watershed conditions would not be irreversibly damaged; and 36 CFR 219.11(d)(3) Timber harvest would be carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, and aesthetic resources. (*Limitations on timber harvest*)

Following the consideration of public comments, if the decision is to pursue a Forest Plan amendment, the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Supervisor will be the responsible official for this project. If the decision is not to pursue a plan amendment, the La Grande District Ranger will be the responsible official.

As a project or activity implementing the land management plan not authorized under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, this project is subject to subparts A and B of the project level pre-decisional administrative review (objection) process as described in 36 CFR 218. Only those individuals or organizations that have submitted timely and specific written comments regarding proposed project activities will be eligible to file an objection. Eligible comments must be signed or verified upon request.

The preliminary EA is available at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57625>. If you would like to receive a hard copy, contact the La Grande Ranger District at 541-962-8500.

Electronic comments must be submitted by:

- Wallowa-Whitman National Forest's project webpage at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57625>. Select the "Comment/Object on Project" link in the "Get Connected" group at the right-hand side of the project webpage.

Hardcopy comments must be submitted by:

- Mail to La Grande Ranger District, Attn: Bill Gamble – District Ranger, 3502 Highway 30, La Grande, OR 97850.

The Sheep Creek Vegetation Management project is a draft with alternatives to consider and not a decision. Your comments will be used to guide a course of action for the project area. Although comments are welcome at any time within the 30-day comment period, they are most helpful if received early. Comments must be electronically submitted, postmarked or received by the District within 30 days from the date of publication of this notice. The publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to submit comments. Comments provided on this project will become a matter of public record.

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